



# Walk-In Access Program

## Off to a Strong Start

### Featured Project

The Walk-In Access (WIA) program is off to a strong start thanks to the efforts of local SWCDs, BWSR and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). WIA provides hunters with public access to private land and compensates landowners for allowing that access. The primary objective is to provide 50,000 acres of new hunting opportunities on private lands with quality wildlife habitat in southwestern Minnesota. Individuals can hunt during any open hunting season (including spring turkey) with no landowner contacts necessary. Locations are posted with Walk-In signs, published in an annual book, and posted on the DNR web site as download maps and GPS points.

WIA enrollment is targeted towards privately owned lands that are already in a conservation program, such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). This is the first of a three year pilot program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A total of 9,117 acres were enrolled this summer in 17 counties with 89 landowners. Nearly 75 percent of the landowners signed contracts for two or three years.



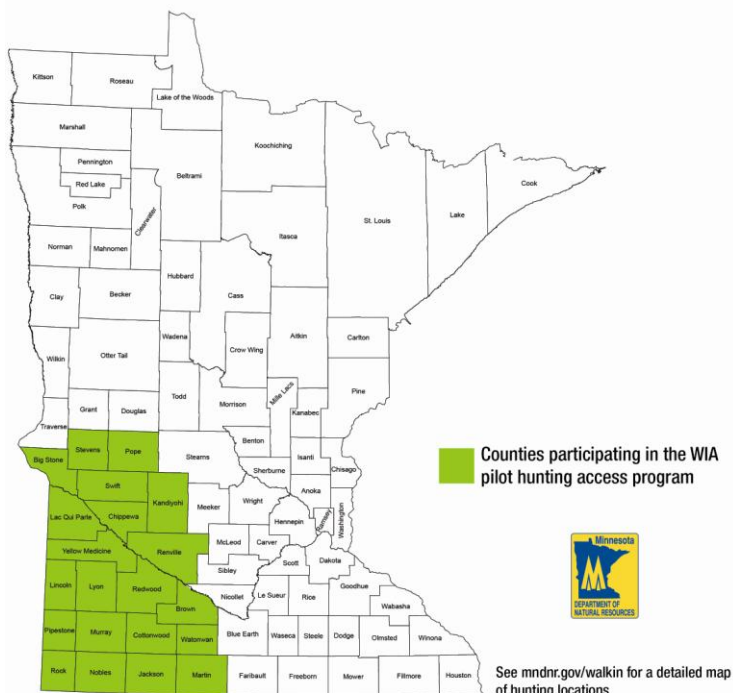
**Figure 1:** DNR staff posts WIA areas with specially designed signs.

## Minnesota Walk In Access (WIA) 2011-2013

**Partners:** The unique WIA partnership has BWSR handling contract administration, DNR coordinating overall management and hunter participation, and SWCDs taking charge of enrollments. Focus group meetings were recently held by BWSR and DNR with representatives from local SWCD offices in the 21-county enrollment area.

**Project Costs / Funding Sources:** U.S. Department of Agriculture has allocated \$2.7m from their Volunteer Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP) to Minnesota for a three year pilot program. The program is funded through May 31, 2012.

WIA is entirely voluntary for landowners. Landowners will be encouraged to participate in the public access program by offering additional payments for public access to quality wildlife habitat. Minimum size is 40 acres, with a bonus



**Figure 2:** The WIA program is currently available in 21 counties in southwestern Minnesota.

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# BWSR Featured Project

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for more than 160 acres. Payment structure is a base rate (\$10) with bonus acres capped at a maximum total of \$13/acre.

**Keys to Success:** The ongoing success and longevity of WIA is dependent on the success of the pilot program and future funding. It is vital that both landowners and hunters have positive experiences with the program. Hunters must follow a Code of Conduct specifically developed for WIA lands. Current federal funding for the pilot program is temporary and a permanent program will require a substantial new source of funds. Future funding for WIA will be a discussion topic at the 2012 DNR Roundtable.

**Enrollment targets:**

Year 1 = 10,000 acres

Year 2 = 25,000 cumulative acres

Year 3 = 50,000 cumulative acres

**Link / contact for more information:** For more information on WIA, visit [www.mndnr.gov/walkin](http://www.mndnr.gov/walkin). You can also call Marybeth Block, WIA coordinator at 651-259-5223 or Tabor Hoek, BWSR private lands coordinator at 507-537-7260.